White Pass Country Museum
Collections Management Policy

SECTION 1: PURPOSE AND SCOPE

1. **Mission Statement:** Our mission is to preserve and share the rich history of the Upper Cowlitz Valley, from Kosmos to White Pass. We celebrate our heritage and culture by connecting diverse communities through exhibits, educational programs, and events.

2. **Statement of Purpose:** In support of this mission, the Museum collects, preserves, and interprets objects and stories that document the people, industries, and landscapes that have shaped life in the Upper Cowlitz Valley. Through responsible stewardship and active community engagement, the Museum ensures that the region's history remains accessible, relevant, and meaningful to current and future generations.

3. **Scope of Collection:** The Museum collects materials that enhance understanding of the people and places of the Upper Cowlitz Valley. Preference is given to materials with strong local provenance and meaningful interpretive value.

   The collection of the White Pass Country Museum focuses on the tangible and intangible heritage of the Upper Cowlitz Valley, encompassing the communities from Kosmos to White Pass and surrounding areas. The collection documents the region's social, cultural, economic, and environmental history from the late 19th century to the present.

   Primary collecting topics include daily life, commerce, transportation, community development, civic organizations and events, traditions, artifacts, natural history and stories related to:
   - Native American
   - Homesteading
   - Timber and mineral industries
   - Recreation and tourism, including Mount Rainier National Park and White Pass Ski Area
   - Mt Rainier, Mt St Helens, Mt Adams, Goat Rocks, Cowlitz River and tributaries
   - Upper Cowlitz Valley schools

   White Pass Country Museum's collection tells the full and inclusive story of the Upper Cowlitz Valley - its landscapes, its industries, and the diverse people who have called it home. It reflects the strength, ingenuity, and interconnectedness of communities shaped by both natural beauty and hard work.

   The collection represents not only well-known Native Americans, homesteaders and industries but also the everyday lives of residents, families, loggers, teachers, shopkeepers, and newcomers alike. It includes voices that have often been left out of regional narratives, such as Indigenous communities, immigrant laborers, and women who built and sustained

the region's towns.

This collection evolves alongside the community, remaining relevant to future generations and continuing to tell the story of a place deeply rooted in heritage, resilience, and shared identity.

4. **Roles and Responsibilities:**
    a. Board of Directors: Oversees accessions, acquisitions, loans, and removals from the collection
    b. Museum Manager: Manages collections care and records.
    c. Volunteers & Staff: Follows handling, storage, and documentation procedures.

Collections are available for research, exhibits, and education. Staff and volunteers must handle all objects respectfully and for museum purposes only.

SECTION 2: DEFINITIONS

"Accessioning" means to record the addition of an item to the Museum's permanent collection.

"Aquisition" means an item acquired by the Museum; acquired items may be accessioned and brought into the permanent collection.

"Deaccessioning" means the formal process of permanently removing an object from the Museum's permanent collection.

"Disposal" means the method by which the deaccessioned object is permanently removed from the museum's physical custody. Disposal decisions are made in compliance with legal requirements, ethical museum standards, donor restrictions, and community considerations.

"Museum or historical society" includes nonprofit or public agencies that care for, exhibit, or preserve such objects.

"Property" means all tangible objects, animate or inanimate, under the Museum's care that have scientific, historic, artistic, or cultural value.

SECTION 3: MUSEUM COLLECTION

1. **Permanent Collection:** Items of enduring historical, cultural, or educational value that document the heritage of the Upper Cowlitz Valley. These include physical and digital items. These objects are formally accessioned, cataloged, and preserved. The permanent collection may be include:

    Educational Materials
    Objects used for teaching, outreach, or interactive exhibits. These materials may be handled

by staff, volunteers, or visitors, and are managed with appropriate care but not subject to the same conservation standards as the permanent collection.

Archival Materials
Documents, photographs, maps, oral histories, and digital records that support research and interpretation. Managed using archival best practices to ensure long-term preservation and access.

Reference or Research Materials
Materials used to support exhibits, research, or interpretation that do not meet the criteria for accession - such as reproductions, duplicates, or items with uncertain provenance.

Digital Materials
Digitized and born-digital materials that expand access to the Museum's holdings and preserve the modern record of the region. Managed through established digital preservation and metadata practices.

2. **Temporary Custody:** Temporary custody is the short-term holding of objects or materials that are not part of the Museum's permanent collection but are being evaluated for inclusion in the permanent collection. These items are placed in the Museum's care for a specific purpose, such as evaluation for possible donation, identification, research, or exhibition planning. During this time, ownership of the object remains with the property owner. Temporary custody does not transfer title to the Museum.

3. **Loaned Items:** Loans are short-term holding of objects or materials that are not part of the Museum's permanent collection but are being used for a specific exhibit or event and will be returned immediately to the owner after the exhibit or event ends. During this time, ownership of the object remains with the property owner. A loan does not transfer title to the Museum.

SECTION 4: ACCESSIONING

1. **Accessioning Policy:** An accession is the formal process by which the museum accepts and records an object (or group of objects) into its permanent collection. An accession includes all objects received from a single source at one time and given one unique accession number.

   Accessioning ensures that each object accepted into the collection is legally owned by the museum, supports the museum's mission, and can be properly cared for and documented. This process also establishes the museum's legal and ethical responsibility for the long-term preservation and management of the objects.

2. **Accessioning Criteria:** Before any item is accepted into the permanent collection, it must meet all of the following criteria. Items that do not meet these criteria will not be accessioned

into the permanent collection. In some cases, the item may be considered acquired for other purposes, such as education or research. Accessioning criteria:

a. The object supports and strengthens the mission and purpose of the museum.
b. The object has clear and legal title, and there are no restrictions that would prevent full transfer of ownership to the museum.
c. The object has documented provenance (history of ownership and use).
d. The object does not unnecessarily duplicate existing items in the collection, unless it adds significant interpretive or research value.
e. The object has educational, historical, cultural, or artistic significance relevant to the museum's focus or community.
f. The object poses no health, safety, or legal risks to staff, visitors, or other collection materials.

3. **Accession Authority and Approval:** The authority to approve accessions rests with the Board of Directors, under recommendation from the Museum Manager. The process generally follows these steps in order:
    a. The Museum Manager evaluates the item against the accession criteria.
    b. If the item meets the criteria, the Museum Manager recommends an acquisition for accession to the Board of Directors.
    c. The Board then votes to approve or decline the accession.

    Once approved, the objects are formally accessioned, assigned an accession number, and entered into the museum's collection records.

1. **Documentation:** Each item is assigned an accession number and recorded with a description, condition, location, and donor information. Whenever possible, items are photographed and entered into the collection database and logbook.

2. **Care and Handling:**
    - Handle all objects with clean hands or gloves.
    - Keep food and drinks away from collection areas.
    - Report any damage, pest activity, or environmental issues immediately.
    - Store and display items in a way that minimizes light, moisture, and handling risks.

3. **Ethical and Legal Considerations:** White Pass Country Museum cares for and manages the collections based on honesty, respect, and responsibility to our community and the people connected to the objects preserved.
    a. Ethical Conduct and Cultural Sensitivity: The Museum strives to treat every item in its care with respect and understanding. The Museum:
        - Recognizes that some objects hold deep cultural or spiritual meaning, and aims to handle them in ways that honor the people and communities they come from.
        - Is committed to working with those communities when possible and supporting repatriation or the return of cultural items when appropriate.

- Cares for collections in ways that are sustainable and responsible for the long term.

b. Conflict of Interest and Personal Collecting: Everyone who represents the Museum, whether staff, board members, employees or volunteers, shall avoid situations where personal interests might conflict with the Museum's mission. Museum representatives should never use their role, access, or inside knowledge to benefit their own collections or those of others. Potential conflicts of interest shall be brought to the Board of Directors.

4. **Appraisals and Financial Valuations:** Museum representatives are not allowed to provide financial appraisals or valuations of cultural materials like objects, artwork, artifacts to anyone outside the Museum, including the public, potential or actual donors to the collection. Staff can only provide value estimates when it's needed for Museum business, like insurance, loans, or risk management, and those valuations are kept confidential and must follow our approved procedures.

SECTION 5: TEMPORARY CUSTODY

1. **Temporary Custody Authority:** Only authorized Museum representatives - the Manager, or Board of Directors - may accept objects into temporary custody on behalf of the Museum. When an object is received, staff will complete a Temporary Custody Form documenting the depositor's contact information, a brief description and condition of the object, the reason for leaving the item in the Museum's temporary custody, and the agreed-upon time frame for its return or final decision. No other staff or volunteers are permitted to accept items into temporary custody without prior authorization.

2. **When Temporary Custody Is Used:**
    a. A community member offers an object for possible donation or purchase, and the Museum needs time to review its relevance and condition.
    b. An individual requests help with identification, research, or documentation of an object related to the Upper Cowlitz Valley, the mountain ranges in the area or the local lookouts.
    c. The Museum needs to examine or photograph an object before confirming a loan or exhibition.
    d. An item is being evaluated for conservation needs or for inclusion in interpretive planning.

3. **Timeframe of Temporary Custody:** Objects will generally remain in temporary custody for no longer than 180 days, or per terms of a formal agreement. If more time is required, an extension must be approved in writing by the Manager or Board of Directors. After the review period, the object will be:
    a. Accepted into the collection following acquisition procedures in this policy, or
    b. Returned to the property owner, or legal authority, with appropriate documentation.

4. **Ethical and Legal Considerations:**All objects in temporary custody will be handled with the same level of care, respect, and accountability that the Museum applies to its permanent collections but they will not be insured by the Museum, nor will the Museum make it available to the public.

SECTION 6: LOANS

1. **On Loan to the Museum:** Loaned items must be approved by the Museum Manager and documented with a Loan Agreement. All objects loaned to the Museum will be handled with the same level of care, respect, and accountability that the Museum applies to its collections but the objects or materials will not be insured by the Museum. Objects loaned to the Museum may be deemed donated pursuant to RCW 36.26.030 when:
    a. Property subject to a loan agreement which is on loan to a museum or historical society shall be deemed to be donated to the museum or society if no claim is made or action filed to recover the property after termination or expiration of the loan and if the museum or society has given notice pursuant to RCW **63.26.040** and no assertion of title has been filed within 90 days from the date of the third notice provided.
    b. A museum or society may terminate a loan of property if the property was loaned to the museum or society for an indefinite term and the property has been held by the museum or society for five years or more. Property on "permanent loan" shall be deemed to be loaned for an indefinite term.
    c. If property was loaned to the museum or society for a specified term, the museum or society may give notice of termination of the loan at any time after expiration of the specified term.

    It is the responsibility of the owner of property on loan to a museum or society to notify the museum or society promptly in writing of any change of address or change in ownership of the property.

2. **Loans to other Entities:** The Museum may loan objects or exhibits to another entity when approved by the Museum Manager or Board of Directors. Items will not be loaned or borrowed for personal use or decoration.

SECTION 7: DEACCESSIONING

1. **Purpose of Deaccession:** The purpose of deaccessioning is to ensure that the Museum's collection remains mission-focused, relevant to the history of the Upper Cowlitz Valley, and manageable within the Museum's resources for preservation and stewardship. Deaccessioning also allows the Museum to address objects that pose risks, lack relevance, or fall outside the collecting scope outlined in this policy.

2. **Deaccessioning Authority and Approval:** Recommendations for deaccession may

originate from the Museum Manager or qualified volunteers involved in collections care. Approval for deaccession shall follow these steps, in order:

a. A written deaccession proposal must be prepared, including the reason(s) for deaccession, evaluation against criteria, condition information, provenance research, and recommended disposal method.
b. All deaccession proposals are submitted to the Board of Directors for review.
c. Final approval for deaccession rests with the Board of Directors, consistent with their authority over major removals from the collection.
d. Once approved, the object is formally deaccessioned in the Museum's records and removed from the accession ledger, database, or inventory documents.
e. The Board of Directors shall make a determination on appropriate disposal based on this policy and all applicable state and federal laws.

3. **Criteria for Deaccession:** An object may be considered for deaccession if it meets one or more of the following criteria:
    - The object lacks relevance to mission or collecting scope.
    - The object is damaged beyond reasonable repair, cannot be stabilized, or poses a hazard to staff, visitors, or other collections (e.g., mold, pests, chemical hazards).
    - The object duplicates items already in the collection without adding significant interpretive, educational, or research value.
    - The object lacks provenance, legal clarity, or identifiable history that limits its usefulness for exhibits, research, or interpretation.
    - The object has not been used for exhibits, programs, or research and is unlikely to be used in the future.
    - The object requires specialized storage, conservation, or environmental controls beyond the Museum's reasonable capacity to provide.
    - The object is determined to be unlawfully acquired, culturally sensitive, or subject to repatriation, or was accessioned in conflict with current ethical standards.
    - The object contains hazardous substances or materials that cannot be safely cared for and are inconsistent with current acquisition criteria.

These criteria mirror the Museum's accession standards; objects that would not be accepted today may be appropriate for removal through deaccession.

SECTION 8: DISPOSAL

1. **Disposal Methods:** The Museum strives to dispose of objects, whether accessioned or not, responsibly and transparently. Disposal will occur based on the following hierarchy:
    a. First, the object will be returned to the original owner or legal authority, unless otherwise stated in the donation agreement.
    b. Second, good-faith effort will be made to contact immediate family members of the original owner to return the object.
    c. Third, if 1 and 2 have been exhausted, then the Board of Directors will determine

which of the following disposal methods is most appropriate and ethical for the object:

- Transfer to another nonprofit or public institution: Priority is given to other museums, archives, libraries, or educational organizations - especially those located within Washington State or those better suited to preserve and interpret the object.
- Repatriation or return to source community or rightful owner: When legally or ethically required, or when the object holds cultural significance for Indigenous or other communities.
- Exchange with another museum or cultural institution: Used when an exchange strengthens the Museum's collection and supports the mission of both institutions.
- Sale: If appropriate, the Museum may sell the object at public auction or through a reputable dealer. All proceeds from sales must be used exclusively for the acquisition or direct care of collections, in accordance with professional standards and accounting regulations.
- Reclassification to the Education or Handling Collection: Objects unsuitable for long-term preservation but useful for hands-on education may be transferred to the Museum's Education Collection only when the museum has identified a probable near-term programmatic use for the item. They must be clearly marked as non-accessioned.
- Destruction: Used only when an object is unsafe, lacks historical or educational value, or cannot be ethically transferred. Destruction must be documented and witnessed by authorized staff.

2. **Unclaimed, Abandoned, or Undocumented Property:** In accordance with Washington State law (RCW 63.26.010–040), the White Pass Country Museum follows a formal process for items that are unclaimed, abandoned, or have unknown or undocumented ownership. The legislation applies to objects temporarily in the Museum's custody, items without clear provenance that appear to have been donated, or objects that remain unclaimed after attempts to return them to the owner have failed.

   Pursuant to RCW 63.26.020: Any property held by a museum or historical society within the state, other than by terms of a loan agreement, that has been held for five years or more and has remained unclaimed shall be deemed to be abandoned. Such property shall become the property of the museum or historical society if the museum or society has given notice pursuant to RCW 63.26.040 and no assertion of title has been filed for the property within 90 days from the date of the third notice provided.

3. **Notice of abandonment of property:** Pursuant to RCW 63.26.040, the following noticing requirements shall be followed prior to disposal of abandoned property:
   a. When a museum or historical society is required to give notice of abandonment of property or of termination of a loan, the museum or historical society shall send an initial notice by certified mail, return receipt requested, to the last known

owner at the most recent address of such owner as shown on the museum's or society's records. If the museum or society has no address on record, or the museum or society does not receive written proof of receipt of the mailed notice within 30 days of the date the notice was mailed, the museum or society shall provide notice, at least once each week for three consecutive weeks, using one or more of the following methods:

i. Posting on a publicly accessible page on its official website;
ii. Sending an email from an organizational email address to any known email addresses of the owner or any publicized email lists;
iii. Posting on the official social media accounts of the museum or society;
iv. Physically posting a notice in a public space at the museum's or society's primary location, such as a lobby or other area accessible to visitors;
v. Documenting a phone call attempt to any known phone numbers of the owner; or
vi. Any other electronic communication methods reasonably expected to reach the owner or interested parties.

b. The notice, whether digital or printed, shall contain the following:

i. A description of the unclaimed property;
ii. The name and last known address of the owner;
iii. A request that all persons who may have any knowledge of the whereabouts of the owner provide written notice to the museum or society; and
iv. A statement that if written assertion of title is not presented by the owner to the museum or society within ninety days from the date of the second notice, the property shall be deemed abandoned or donated and shall become the property of the museum or society.

c. For purposes of this chapter, if the loan of property was made to a branch of a museum or society, the museum or society is deemed to be located in the county in which the branch is located. Otherwise the museum or society is located in the county in which it has its principal place of business

d. Unknown donor.

i. When property is found in the collection of a museum or historical society without donor documentation or when property is abandoned at a museum or historical society without the donor's identity being provided, the museum or historical society shall follow a process to establish ownership of the property. The process must include an unknown donor notification, where notice is given to the public through at least one of the following methods:
    1. Posting on a publicly accessible page on the museum's or society's official website; or
    2. Physically posting a notice in a public space at the museum's or society's primary location, such as a lobby or other area accessible to visitors.
ii. The unknown donor notification shall contain the following:

1. A general description of the property;
2. A statement requesting that any person claiming ownership or having information about the possible donor contact the museum or society in writing;
3. Contact information for the museum or society, including an address and email address where claims or inquiries may be sent; and
4. A statement that if no claim or information establishing ownership is received by the museum or society within 90 days from the date of the notice, the property shall be deemed donated and shall become the property of the museum or society.

iii. Any person claiming ownership of the property must provide proof of ownership in writing to the museum or historical society.

4. **Archaeological Resources:** The Museum shall follow all applicable state and federal rules and regulations.

SECTION 9: AMENDMENTS

This policy may be amended or superseded by two-thirds (⅔) vote of the Board of Directors at a meeting where a quorum is present.

Approved in a regular Board Meeting on this 14th day of January, 2026.

Tracy Cashaw
President

Robert Bordeaux
Vice President

As amended:

Date	Secretary Signature